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# Commander Zero: Still chasing the smell of gunpowder

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Eden Pastora stared suspiciously at the complicated black camera, a mass of gears and motors and shutters and other techno-junk whirring and clicking like R2D2 in the thrall of romantic ecstasy, even though no human was within three feet of it.

"Is it broken?" he asked the photographer, who was rooting around in his bag for some more film. The photographer assured him it was not. Pastora shook his head. "Machine guns do not scare me," he announced, "but, señor, your camera — that scares me."

His remark got an appreciative laugh. Because Eden Pastora's enemies have accused him of lacking many things — political acumen, ideological perspective, humility, even brains — but the word "courage" has almost never been on the list. How could it? He has spent almost the whole of the last 24 years in the jungle, fighting first to overthrow the ruling Somoza dynasty, and now to unseat his former revolutionary compañeros, the Sandinistas.

Pastora — better known, perhaps, as "Commander Zero," military hero of the 1979 revolution — left his jungle camp in the swampy, malaria-infested south of Nicaragua a week ago for his first legal visit (he's been here a couple of times on covert gun-running missions) to the United States, seeking support for the rag-tag army of grizzled peasants and fuzzy-checked teen-agers he believes can oust the current regime.

The war is "going well," he says. "With the popular support, it's going in the best of ways, even though the economic support is almost none." Inflation has run up the cost of even a bargain-basement guerrilla army; Pastora's deputies have estimated their costs

at \$200,000 to \$300,000 a month. This summer the cash flow was so bad that Pastora had to pull his soldiers out of the field for a couple of weeks.

One problem is that the only well-heeled patron of guerrilla armies that seek to topple

Marxist governments is the American CIA, which thus far has been backing a rival group of Nicaraguan rebels. And for a long time Pastora said he wouldn't take CIA money anyway, the agency not having the most savory of reputations in Central America.

But now, Pastora says, he'll take money from any source in order to keep fighting — even from the CIA. But he's not expecting a check in the mail any time soon. "It's very difficult, very difficult," he explains. "We accept money without any conditions, and very openly, too. But it's very difficult for the American CIA to give money without a commitment from the person they're giving it to."

And Eden Pastora doesn't give many commitments of that kind, as his former Sandinista allies have discovered. When Pastora left his post as vice-minister of defense in the Sandinista regime in 1981 and then disavowed the government, shock waves rippled through Central America. For, until the moment he turned his back on them, there was no more dedicated Sandinista than Pastora himself.

He joined the Sandinista Front of National Liberation in its infancy, in 1959. But he learned to hate the Somoza family — the American-backed line of caudillos, or strongmen, who had ruled Nicaragua for decades — much earlier, at the age of 7. It was then that his father was murdered by the Somocista National Guard.

Too many such murders, coupled with widespread corruption, would eventually turn most Nicaraguans against the Somoza dynasty. But in those early days, the Sandinistas were very much alone. And almost from the first day, Pastora specialized in missions that were seemingly suicidal. His very first battle was an attack on an army barracks in the little border town of Las Trojes.

"We were only 35 men fighting a whole garrison of 250 to 300," he later recalled. "It

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